

Estates General

- The Estates General was the legislative body of France up until the French Revolution. The king would call a meeting of the Estates General when he wanted the advice on certain issues.
- The Estates General didn't meet regularly and had no real power.
- The Estates General was made up of different groups of people called "Estates." The "Estates" were important social divisions in the culture of ancient France. What estate you belonged to had a major impact on your social status and quality of life.
 - First Estate - The First Estate was made up of the clergy. These were people who worked for the church including priests, monks, bishops, and nuns. This was the smallest estate in terms of population.
 - Second Estate - The Second Estate was the French nobility. These people held most of the high offices in the land, got special privileges, and didn't have to pay most of the taxes.
 - Third Estate - The rest of the population (around 98% of the people) were members of the Third Estate. These people were the peasants, craftspeople, and laborers of the land. They paid taxes including the gabelle (a tax on salt) and the corvee (they had to work a certain number of days for free for the local lord or the king each year).
- The Estates General of 1789 In 1789, the King Louis XVI called a meeting of the Estates General. It was the first meeting of the Estates General called since 1614. He called the meeting because the French government was having financial problems.
- One of the first issues that came up at the Estates General was how they would vote. The king said that each estate would vote as a body (each estate would get 1 vote). The members of the Third Estate did not like this. It meant that they could always be outvoted by the much smaller First and Second Estates.
 - They wanted the vote to be based on the number of members.
- The Third Estate Declares the National Assembly. After arguing over how they would vote for several days, the Third Estate began to take matters into their own hands. They met on their own and invited members of the other estates to join them. On June 13, 1789, the Third Estate declared itself the "National Assembly."